



Pillars Community Health

Healing. Caring. Educating.

5 Health Tips for Strong Mental Health

Your eating habits, sleep habits, environment, and other physical factors can impact your mental health for the better or worse. Follow these tips to set boundaries and structure that will help you improve your mental health and physical health simultaneously.

Tip #1: Establish a healthy eating routine.

Eating a balanced diet rich in vegetables and fruits can improve your mental health. The mind communicates with the stomach via the vagus nerve; if we are overeating, it causes our minds to be clouded, forgetful, and irritable. Being mindful of what we eat can contribute to healthy emotional behavior since studies have shown connections between the brain and bacteria living in the stomach. Stomach bacteria produce an array of neurochemicals that the brain uses for the regulation of physiological and mental processes, including mood, according to the American Psychological Association. Stress, depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders are thought to suppress beneficial stomach bacteria.

Schedule five or six smaller healthy meals throughout the day, and remember to stay hydrated. In your diet, include foods like:

- Complex carbohydrates (like brown rice, starchy vegetables, quinoa, millet, beets, and sweet potatoes) will keep you satisfied longer and gives you energy.
- Lean proteins and fatty acids are essential for function of your brain, nervous system, and energy. This includes foods like fish, meat, chicken, eggs, nuts, soybeans, and flaxseeds as well as healthy fats such as olive oil, coconut oil and avocado.
- Avoid processed snack foods and sugar-filled snacks which leads unhealthy energy levels. Stock up on healthy snacks to eat during the day.
- Focus on eating “brain foods,” including plenty of fruits and vegetables and foods rich in Omega-3 fatty acids.
- Vitamin D, B-Complex, and other vitamins and minerals.

Find a place to sit, relax, and be mindful of what you’re eating by chewing slowly and appreciating the taste and texture of your food.

Tip #2: Get moving.

Making time for exercise can help with motivation, energy, and increase productivity. A quick run, long walk, or a 10-minute cardio workout in your home will help boost energy throughout the day. During the workday, carving out time for stretching or walking in your workspace in between meetings can help.



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Tip #3: Maintain structure and balance in your lifestyle.

Begin each morning by making a to-do list. Prioritize your tasks to avoid feeling overwhelmed; set aside things that can wait for another day and make sure to be realistic to your mental capacity.

Balance work and family life by setting boundaries in place. If you work from home, designate a space that fits your needs and avoid working in your bedroom, which can make you associate an otherwise safe space with stressful feelings. Keep things clean: A home/workspace that is clean and organized will help you to work effectively.

Be sure to take breaks! Step away from work throughout the day to engage in self-care activities such as talking with friends, reading, meditating, listening to podcasts/music, playing games with your family, etc. Try mindful breathing several times a day, and get fresh air if weather permits. If you are caring for loved ones, schedule breaks (remember: taking a break to help a loved one is not a break for you).

Tip #4: Stay connected.

Be sure to reach out to family, friends, colleagues, and community groups for social contact. Stay connected in whatever way works for your current situation and in a way that will not negatively contribute to mental illness or other stressors.

Tip #5: Stick to your sleep schedule.

Getting adequate rest, which consists of about eight hours of sleep a night, can ensure you have enough energy to start a new day. It can often be tempting to stay up later or stay up working. However, setting boundaries and alarms and creating to-do lists can help manage this habit and create a consistent sleeping schedule.

References:

Stranges, S., Samaraweera, P.C., Taggart, F., Kandala, N.B., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2014). Major health-related behaviours and mental well-being in the general population: The Health Survey for England. *BMJ Open*, 4(9), e005878

Hand Book of Health, p. 122.4 (John Norton Loughborough)

<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/wellness-hub>

Pillars Community Health provides health, social and educational services including Medical, Dental, Mental Health and Addictions, Domestic and Sexual Violence, Benefits Assistance, Prevention/Health Education and Outreach, and more. We envision communities where all people have equal access to the care they need, when they need it. Learn more at www.PillarsCommunityHealth.org, or call 708-745-5277.